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SECRET.

COPY NO.

C A B I N E T 39 (38)

Meeting of the Cabinet to be held at 10 Downing Street,  
S.W.1., on SATURDAY, 17th SEPTEMBER, 1938, at  
11.0 a.m.

AGENDUM

THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION: CENTRAL EUROPE:  
CZECHOSLOVAKIA: THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO HERR  
HITLER.

(Reference Cabinet 38 (38))

- (a) Statement by the Prime Minister.
- (b) Notes by Sir Horace Wilson circulated by  
direction of the Prime Minister.  
C.P. 202 (38) - circulated herewith.

(Signed) E.E. BRIDGES

Secretary to the Cabinet.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.

16th September, 1938.

SECRET.

COPY NO. \_\_\_\_\_

C A B I N E T 39(38).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held  
at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Saturday,  
17th September, 1938, at 11.0 a.m. and  
resumed at 3.0 p.m.

P R E S E N T :-

The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P.,  
Prime Minister. (In the Chair).

The Right Hon.

Sir John Simon, G.C.S.I., G.C.V.O.,  
O.B.E., K.C., M.P., Chancellor of  
the Exchequer.

The Right Hon.

Lord Maugham, Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon.

The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,  
G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Secretary  
of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Most Hon.

The Marquess of Zetland, G.C.S.I.,  
G.C.I.E., Secretary of State for  
India.

The Right Hon.

Sir Thomas Inskip, C.B.E., K.C.,  
M.P., Minister for Co-  
ordination of Defence.

The Right Hon.

L. Hore-Belisha, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon.

John Colville, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon.

W.S. Morrison, M.C., K.C., M.P.,  
Minister of Agriculture and  
Fisheries.

The Right Hon.

Walter Elliot, M.C., M.P.,  
Minister of Health.

The Right Hon.

E.L. Burgin, M.P.,  
Minister of Transport.

The Right Hon.

The Viscount Hailsham,  
Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon.

Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., G.C.S.I.,  
G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P., Secretary  
of State for Home Affairs.

The Right Hon.

The Earl De La Warr,  
Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon.

Malcolm MacDonald, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for the  
Colonies.

The Right Hon.

A. Duff Cooper, D.S.O., M.P.,  
First Lord of the Admiralty.

The Right Hon.

Sir Kingsley Wood, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon.

Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P.,  
President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon.

The Earl Stanhope, K.G., D.S.O.,  
M.C., President of the Board of  
Education.

The Right Hon.

Ernest Brown, M.C., M.P.,  
Minister of Labour.

The Right Hon.

The Earl Winterton, M.P.,  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:

The Right Hon. The Viscount Runciman. \*

Mr. E.E. Bridges, M.C. .... Secretary.

\* Present for part of the morning meeting only.

THE INTER-  
NATIONAL  
SITUATION.

--  
Central Europe.

--  
Czechoslovakia.

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The Prime  
Minister's  
Visit to Herr  
Hitler.

(Previous  
Reference:  
Cabinet 38  
(38)).

FR. 40(38)2.

The Cabinet met for the purpose of hearing from the Prime Minister a statement on his recent visit to Herr Hitler at Berchtesgaden in connection with the position in Central Europe and Czechoslovakia, and the serious international situation which had arisen. The Cabinet also had before them a copy of Notes by Sir Horace Wilson, who had accompanied the Prime Minister (C.P. 202(38)).

THE PRIME MINISTER thought the most convenient plan would be that the Cabinet should first hear from Lord Runciman, whom they were glad to have with them, an account of the present position in Czechoslovakia. That would be the proper background for his account of his visit to Herr Hitler. The Cabinet knew how great an influence Lord Runciman had established in Czechoslovakia, and what respect was felt in that country for his impartiality and industry. It must be a disappointment to him that after so much work the situation should have deteriorated so rapidly. It would be a great mistake, however, to think that Lord Runciman's work had been thrown away. It had succeeded in preserving the situation, and had convinced the world that every possible effort had been made to find a solution by mediation. This country was under a deep debt of gratitude to Lord Runciman and his Staff.

LORD RUNCIMAN said that he was, of course, disappointed that he had not been able to bring about a solution by agreement between the parties concerned. He had borne it in mind, however, that Lord Halifax had told him, when he left for Prague, that time gained was of



importance. He could not have carried out the work which he had done without the assistance of his admirable staff. In particular, he owed a great deal to Mr. Ashton-Gwatkin.

On his arrival at Prague, Lord Runciman had found the Czech Government blind to what was going on around them. Dr. Benes was a man of great ability, so agile that he made those about him distrust him. Dr. Hodza was an excellent Prime Minister, but with rather limited experience. The other members of the Czech Cabinet were of poor quality and did not count.

At the outset, Lord Runciman continued, he had made enquiries into the political and economic position. Much of the support which the Sudeten Germans received came from people who were suffering from a very acute economic depression, and the efforts which his Mission had made to find solutions for those economic troubles had strengthened their hands.

On the political issues, the Sudeten Germans had from the outset been very suspicious. Herr Henlein lived at Asch, four hours' motor journey away from Prague, and could only be seen occasionally. He was a genial, good-tempered person, but nothing much could be got out of him. Lord Runciman had since learned that, even before his own arrival in Prague, Herr Henlein had been in frequent communication with Berlin.

Herr Frank had a bad influence and was unreliable. Recently he had broken away from the Party and had become more extreme.



Herr Kundt, on the other hand, had been very useful to the Mission. He was a good type of man, who knew his case well and could be relied upon. Lord Runciman said that before leaving Prague on the previous day he had asked Herr Kundt whether he was still a member of the Party. He had replied that he had severed his connection with the Party as, although he was not a Czech, he did not want to become a German subject. Herr Kundt was ready to resume conversations at any time if we wanted him to do so.

Lord Runciman said that one of his difficulties had been to get at the real facts, behind all the exaggeration which was current. By degrees he had got the two parties into the way of saying what points they would agree to, and had induced them to put their names to various plans.

Lord Runciman gave some details of the four plans which had been produced. The last of these which still held the field, included the eight Carlsbad points, and would have given Herr Henlein and his colleagues a basis on which they could have agreed to participate in the government of the country. There was no point in putting forward any further plan at the present time.

The Sudeten Party now proposed the inclusion of the Sudeten areas in the Reich. The Czech Government would take strong action to stop this. They had ordered the arrest of Herr Henlein, who was now in Bavaria.

Various possible solutions had been put forward to deal with the present position. The Sudeten-German leaders spoke of a plebiscite as though it offered the only possible solution. The difficulties in the way of such a solution were, of course, very

great, though he (Lord Runciman) would not say that they could not be overcome. He mentioned, for example, the definition of areas; the formulation of the questions to be put; the control which would be needed to prevent intimidation, and so forth. Even in normal times a plebiscite would not have been the best way of dealing with the situation. At the present time, he doubted whether free expression of opinion was possible. He thought that Dr. Benes shared this doubt. The Army would not stand the strain of a plebiscite well.

The great centres of opposition to the Government were Eger and Asch, in the north-western corner of Bohemia, which contained about 800,000 Germans and very few of any other race. The transfer of these areas to Germany would almost certainly be a good thing. On the other hand, the Czechoslovak army would certainly oppose any transfer of territory very strongly. Dr. Benes had said that they would fight rather than accept it.

The Military Attache had said that the Czechoslovak army was a formidable force, but lacked experience.

A second possible solution was the creation of a new and independent Sudeten-German State, but it was clear that nothing could be made of this alternative in present conditions.

Another third solution was a Four-Power Conference. This suggestion would probably have to be linked up somehow to the plebiscite, if a plebiscite was adopted as the best way out.

Mr. Newton, our Minister in Prague, was in favour of a Federal solution. Mr. Newton was a man of much commonsense, who had kept his head very well. Mr. Newton agreed, however,

that at the present time a Federal solution was unlikely to be acceptable.

Lord Runciman said that it had been suggested in various telegrams that he should produce a plan of his own. He had always been reluctant to adopt this course, since it would draw upon <sup>himself and possibly on the British Government</sup> ~~himself~~ the fire of criticism. For this reason his Mission had never fathered the fourth plan, which had met with a considerable measure of support.

Even at the present time a number of bankers, including men like Dr. Preiss, thought that a solution based on the fourth plan might prove acceptable. Dr. Preiss's suggested solution included the following:-

- (1) The Carlsbad Eight Points, which the Czech Government had now accepted.
- (2) Suppression of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia.
- (3) Denunciation of the Russian-Czech Political Treaty.

(Lord Runciman here said that Dr. Benes had told him there was no such Treaty, and maintained that there was only "an *indirect* understanding" between the two countries).

- (4) Permanent representation of the Sudeten-German people in the Cabinet.

(This would probably have been accepted by the Czechs).

- (5) A Commission of equal numbers of Czechs and Germans to deal with disputes in carrying out the agreement.
- (6) A Commercial Treaty with Germany.

Lord Runciman thought, however, that there was no hope that this plan would now prove acceptable.

Lord Runciman then replied to a number of questions which were put to him by members of the Cabinet.

He said that he had reached the



conclusion that Czechoslovakia could not continue to exist as she was today. Something would have to be done, even if it amounted to no more than cutting off certain fringes.

There were numerous instances of Sudeten Germans having been pushed out of Government posts and Czechs put in their places. This applied to nearly all the State Services.

Again, in affording financial assistance to distressed areas, the Government had taken care to see that practically all the money had gone to Czech areas. The Czechs were, in fact, themselves responsible for most of the trouble.

Lord Runciman explained how he had succeeded in persuading the Czech Government to dispossess ~~the~~ Czech officials in Eger and Asch, and to replace them <sup>a few</sup> by Germans. There had been <sup>some</sup> ~~considerable~~ rejoicing over these and other changes which had been made.

As regards Dr. Benes, he thought that he was rather more honest than he allowed himself to appear to be. He was much cleverer than anyone else in the country, and this gave him a reputation for slipperiness. It would <sup>be</sup> a calamity if both Dr. Benes and Dr. Hodza left the Government. He doubted whether Dr. Benes could persuade the Czech Army to accept a plebiscite. He thought that there was a considerable percentage of people in the German areas who did not wish to be incorporated in the Reich.

Asked whether Dr. Benes still relied on French assistance, Lord Runciman said that the French Minister, at a party given by the latter, had spoken very freely about the attitude of France and had told half a dozen people that there

were things for which France would not go to war, and that it was just as well that they should be clearly known.

In reply to a question from the Home Secretary, as to whether the two sides had ever been near to agreement, Lord Runciman said that about a fortnight ago they had been very close, but at that time he had not fully realised the close connection between the Sudeten-German leaders and Berlin. Dr. Benes had then slowed up the negotiations, which had again become difficult.

In reply to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Runciman said that he thought Herr Kundt would obtain considerable support. The other officials of the party had left Prague, but Herr Kundt had stayed on there.

THE PRIME MINISTER thanked Lord Runciman for his statement, which he thought would be of great assistance to the Cabinet in sizing up the position.

THE PRIME MINISTER then gave an account of his visit to Herr Hitler. He attached great importance to the dramatic side of the visit, since we were dealing with an individual and a new technique of diplomacy relying on personal contacts was required.

The Prime Minister described how, from the time of his arrival at the airfield at Munich, there were crowds in the towns and villages along his route, who saluted and welcomed him. He had travelled by train from Munich to Berchtesgaden, a journey of three hours. There was nothing in the conversations which he had on the journey which was of special importance.

On arrival at Berchtesgaden, he was met by a guard of honour and, after half an hour's wait at the hotel, he had driven up the mountain. After passing two guarded entrances, they found themselves at the Brown House. Hitler was standing halfway down the steps and came down to shake hands with him.

On a first view, Herr Hitler was unimpressive. There was nothing out of the common in his features. The party had proceeded through a barely furnished corridor to the big room, which had so often been described where they had had tea.

At one point during the visit Herr Hitler had expressed his distress at the long journey the Prime Minister had had to undertake. He had thought of offering to come to England but had realised that the difficulties were too great. At another point, Herr Hitler had asked whether there would be strong demonstrations of disapproval if he came to London, to which the Prime Minister had replied that it would be as well to choose the right moment.

After talking platitudes for about half an hour, Herr Hitler asked him what was to be the next stage. Would he like two or three of each side to be present? The Prime Minister had said that he would prefer a private talk with Herr Hitler alone.

About 5.20, therefore, the Prime Minister and Herr Hitler went off with Dr. Schmidt to Herr Hitler's room. The conversation lasted until 8.15 p.m.



The Prime Minister said that he had no idea that this conversation would last anything approaching so long a time. What he had in mind was to open by suggesting to Herr Hitler that this was an opportunity for bringing about a new understanding between England and Germany. He had started on this line. He had said that this idea had been in his mind ever since he had been Prime Minister. Up till now various events had occurred which had rendered it impossible to make any progress, but he hoped that the opportunity had now come. The events of the last few weeks, however, had been so serious that, unless some remedy could be found, it seemed likely that his hopes of an understanding would continue to be disappointed. It was this, and not merely the troubles in Czechoslovakia, that had made him want to visit Herr Hitler. Herr Hitler had replied that the other matters to which the Prime Minister referred were of great importance, but unfortunately there was something else of the utmost urgency and could not wait, namely the Sudeten-German question. The Prime Minister had then agreed to discuss this matter.

The Prime Minister said he would like to give the impression which he had formed of Herr Hitler as the conversation proceeded. He saw no signs of insanity but many of excitement. Occasionally Herr Hitler would lose the thread of what he was saying and would go off into a tirade. It was impossible not to be impressed with the power of the man. He was extremely determined; he had thought out what he wanted and he meant to get it and he would not brook opposition beyond a certain point. Further, and this was a point of considerable importance, the Prime Minister had formed the opinion that Herr Hitler's objectives were strictly limited.

Having agreed to discuss the Czechoslovakian situation, he had been surprised that Herr Hitler did not at once start by saying that his people were being tortured. Instead he had given an historical account of his attitude towards Germany's neighbours. He dealt first with his Agreement with Poland: he regarded his boundary with Poland as being definitely fixed. Next France. If the Saar had been allocated to France, it would have been a source of friction, but in the end it had come to Germany and that matter was now closed. He repeated that he had renounced any claim to Alsace Lorraine. Next, he spoke of the British Naval Treaty. He had made the Treaty because he had thought he would never be at war with England, but (and here Herr Hitler began to talk truculently) if there ceased to be an understanding that there would be no war between England and Germany, and if English people continued to talk, as they had recently, in a threatening way, then it might be better to denounce the Naval Treaty.

At this point the Prime Minister said that he had interrupted, and had asked for Herr Hitler's statement to be interpreted, - a course he had to adopt many times during the discussion. Did the Fuehrer mean that he would denounce the Treaty before we went to war with him? The Fuehrer answered in the affirmative; he had made the Treaty on the assumption that we had

renounced all idea of going to war with Germany. The Prime Minister said that he would like to deal with this point at once. It was for Herr Hitler to decide what he wanted to do, but in his (the Prime Minister's) view there was the greatest difference between a warning and a threat. After 1914 it had been said that if Germany had been warned of our attitude in time, she would never have come into the war. We did not want people to make that complaint again. There would be just grounds for complaint if we let it be thought that in no circumstances would we go to war with Germany, if, in fact, there were circumstances in which we should do so. He thought it was better that that should be made clear.

Herr Hitler replied that a warning or a threat had much the same result. The Prime Minister said he thought it better not to pursue the point further at the time.

Herr Hitler then continued his review of his relations with his neighbours. From his youth up he had pursued the idea of racial unity. He referred to the 10 million Germans outside the Reich; 7 million in Austria and 3 million in the Sudeten lands. The Austrians were now in the Reich. There remained the Sudeten Germans. In this connection, Herr Hitler distinguished between what was possible and what was impossible, and said he appreciated that there were Germans living outside Germany who could not be brought into the Reich.



As regards the Sudeten Germans, they wanted to come in. They must come in. If they were not allowed to come in, he would have to see that they did, and if necessary he would run the risk of a world war in order to bring them in. This, said the Prime Minister, was the gist of what Herr Hitler said, although he could not say that this was the exact equivalent of the words used.

At this point the Prime Minister said that he again stopped Herr Hitler and said that there was something which he wished to know which was most important. Suppose that the Sudeten Germans were included in the Reich, was that all that Herr Hitler wanted, or had he some other aims? The point was of importance, because there were a number of people in England who did not believe what Herr Hitler said. They thought that he was trying to deceive us, and they took the view that his real aim was not merely the inclusion of the Sudeten Germans in the Reich, but the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.✓

Herr Hitler then said that what he was concerned with was the German race. He did not wish to include Czechs in the Reich. When he had included the Sudeten Germans in the Reich he would be satisfied. He referred to his Treaties with Belgium and Holland. The only other place which he mentioned was Memel, which he said

he was prepared to leave, provided the Lithuanians stood by the Statute of Memel.

The Prime Minister said that the impression left on him was that Herr Hitler meant what he said. He thought also that this conversation was consistent with what Herr Hitler had said at other times. It was clearly of the utmost importance to make up one's mind whether the inclusion of the Sudeten Germans in the Reich was the end at which Herr Hitler was aiming or only a beginning. This was a matter on which one could only exercise one's judgment. The Prime Minister's view was that Herr Hitler was telling the truth.

At this point the Prime Minister had said to Herr Hitler "Speaking without prejudice and supposing it was decided to incorporate the Sudeten Germans into the Reich, are there not practical difficulties to be worked out? Thus, if all the districts containing 80 per cent. of Germans were incorporated, that would leave many Germans behind in Czechoslovakia and there would be many Czechs in the incorporated areas. Would not that have to be provided for? Would it not be necessary to have not merely a transfer of territory, but a transfer of populations?" Herr Hitler had agreed, but had said that it was not a question of percentages. Where there was a majority of Germans, there the territory must go to the Reich. With regard to the transfer of populations, that might be arranged, or it might be decided that the minorities should stay where they were, under suitable safeguards.

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The Prime Minister had said that he thought there were other difficulties, whereupon Herr Hitler had said that this was academic. They had to face terrible facts. He referred to a statement that 300 Sudeten Germans had been killed the day before, that villages were being put into a state of siege and that refugees were pouring across the frontier. All this must be solved at once. At this point Herr Hitler began to grow excited.

The Prime Minister said that at this stage he had thought it necessary to show a stiffer attitude. He had said that if the Fuehrer really intended to settle the matter in this way he wondered why he had allowed the Prime Minister to come to see him, and whether he (the Prime Minister) had not wasted his time in coming and had not better go home. This was perhaps the turning point of the conversation. Herr Hitler became quieter in his manner. The Prime Minister had suggested that he and Herr Hitler might issue some joint appeal to the parties to restrain their followers. Herr Hitler had raised objections to this, and the Prime Minister had not pursued the suggestion. Then Herr Hitler had said that it all depended on the attitude of the British Government. If the British Government could not accept the principle of self-determination there was no use in pursuing the negotiations; if they could, then he thought that he and the Prime Minister could get to work and discuss the method of procedure.

The Prime Minister had said in reply that he was not in a position to give any such assurance. It was necessary for him to consult the British Cabinet, the French Government and Lord Runciman. (He had not mentioned the Czech Government at this point). But he would give Herr Hitler his personal opinion, which was that, looking at the question as one of principle, it was immaterial to him whether the Sudeten Germans stayed in Czechoslovakia or were included in the Reich. What the British people wanted was a peaceful and a just settlement. It was the practical difficulties of the position that troubled him.

Herr Hitler then asked what course the Prime Minister suggested. The Prime Minister had proposed that the conversations should be adjourned, that he should go back to England and consult his colleagues, and that, having done so, he should return to continue the conversations. Herr Hitler had agreed to this, but had expressed regret that the Prime Minister should have a second long journey and had offered to come as far as the frontier for the second meeting.

The question had then been discussed whether the position in Czechoslovakia could be held in the meantime. The Fuehrer's first approach to this had been to say that it was a matter for the Czechs; if only they would withdraw the State police and confine the troops to barracks and stop mobilisation, order would be restored at once. The Prime Minister had then asked whether Herr Hitler could not do something to assist this object.

Herr Hitler had replied that the German military machine was a terrific instrument. In effect, he had left it to be understood that the machine was ready to act at any moment. Any serious incident which occurred would release the spring and the pincers would close. Once the machine was put in motion, nothing could stop it.

Herr Hitler gave an assurance that he would not give the order to set the machine in motion pending the resumption of conversations, if he could help it. He felt bound to make this qualification because some incident might occur which would force his hand.

In the Prime Minister's judgment the situation when he went out to Germany had been one of desperate urgency. If he had not gone he thought that hostilities would have started by now. The atmosphere had been electric. Fantastic stories of outrages were accepted without question. A man as excitable as Herr Hitler might easily be carried away by some unfounded report.

The Prime Minister said that his impression was that Herr Hitler would prove to be better than his word, and that he would take care not to set the military machine in motion for a period long enough to allow us time for a reasonable discussion. At the same time, the longer the delay the greater the danger, since it was impossible to rely on a continuation of the relaxation of tension which had been secured.

The Prime Minister said that Sir Horace Wilson had taken great pains to impress on Dr. von Dirksen, and the other German officials with whom he had come in contact, that any aggressive action taken by Germany before the Prime Minister's second visit took place would be treated by the British people as an intolerable affront.



The Prime Minister thought that Herr Hitler would hold the position until the conversations had been resumed, but it was important to lose no time.

The Prime Minister emphasised that there had been no opportunity for him to put smaller points, or to try and impose conditions, or to get Herr Hitler to accept alternative solutions which seemed reasonable over here but which would not have been accepted in the atmosphere prevailing at Berchtesgarden. The only practical course had been for him to return home and consult his colleagues.

The Prime Minister concluded by saying that when he left Herr Hitler he had been uncertain what impression he had made upon him. He mentioned, however, that Herr Hitler's manner was definitely different when they left his study; he had stopped halfway down the stairs and lamented the fact that the bad weather made it impossible for him to take the Prime Minister to see the view from the top of the mountain. Herr Hitler had said that he hoped this might be possible on some other occasion. Information from other sources had been to the effect that the Fuehrer had been most favourably impressed. This was of the utmost importance, since the future conduct of these negotiations depended mainly upon personal contacts.

The Prime Minister thought that it was not possible to deal with a man such as Herr Hitler by attaching conditions. He thought, however, that if the principle of self-determination was accepted and negotiations were entered into as to the method of applying that principle, Herr Hitler would not prove too difficult about such questions as the area of the plebiscite, and the conditions under which it was to be carried out.

At the end of the conversation Herr Hitler had said that when the Czechoslovakian question was settled he would like to take up the question of Anglo-German relations and especially the question of colonies; Germany would not abandon her demand for colonies, but it was not a war matter.

The Prime Minister thought that, if it was possible to get a settlement of the present difficulty, there was a chance of obtaining a settlement of other matters also.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR asked whether by "self-determination" Herr Hitler meant a plebiscite.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that Herr Hitler had not used the word "plebiscite", but he felt sure that that was what he meant. He added that the German Foreign Office had for some time been working on plebiscite questions.

The Prime Minister added that Herr Hitler had made some allusion to the Soviet Treaty. He (the Prime Minister) had asked whether, if the Sudeten Germans were brought into the Reich, Herr Hitler would feel any anxiety about the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Herr Hitler's answer had been "Yes, if the Treaty continues". The Prime Minister had asked what would happen if the Treaty was modified. Herr Hitler had answered this indirectly by saying that if the Sudeten Germans were given self-determination the same would have to be done for the Hungarians, the Poles, and the Slovaks. If that happened he would not worry in the least about what would be left of Czechoslovakia.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS said <sup>while</sup> that the question of the other minorities was ~~very~~ important, ~~he~~ did not feel that the plebiscite need apply to them.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that the Polish Minister, whom he had seen the previous day, had said that if a plebiscite was given to the Sudeten Germans the Polish Government would expect it for the Poles in Czechoslovakia, e.g., at Teschen. If this was not granted the relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia would be seriously strained.



THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR asked whether it would be possible to accept the principle of self-determination, on an undertaking being given by Herr Hitler that it should be carried out on really fair conditions, and if he agreed to demobilise the Army before effect was given to self-determination.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he did not think it was possible to attach conditions to our acceptance of the principle. We should make no progress in that way. What he would like to say was that now the principle had been agreed, it remained to examine how it should be carried out. He thought we could make good progress on these lines. This, of course, could not be done until we had consulted the French.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE said that unless the Czech Government were prepared to co-operate in arranging a fair plebiscite, he did not see how a proper plebiscite could be carried through. He feared that it might be difficult to get the Czech Government to accept the solution of a plebiscite, and it seemed to him that force might have to be used to prevent fighting from breaking out. He asked whether it was proposed that the Cabinet's decision should be communicated to the Opposition and to Parliament before the Prime Minister saw Herr Hitler again.

FR. 45(38)3.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he proposed to see representatives of the Opposition and to explain the present position to them. As regards Parliament, his view was that a discussion in Parliament at the present time would result in wrecking very delicate negotiations. Parliament would be summoned as soon as that course would be helpful. In effect, Parliament would be informed of the decision of His Majesty's Government after it had been taken. It would be for Parliament to say whether they

FR. 45(38)3.



approved the course taken, and **were** prepared to ratify it.

Discussion then ensued as to the attitude to be adopted vis-a-vis the French Government.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that all the French Government had been told was that the Prime Minister had found the situation critical, but thought that Herr Hitler would hold his hand until the conversations could be resumed. They had also been told that Herr Hitler had pressed for acceptance of the principle of self-determination, but that the method of giving effect to that principle had not been discussed.

The Foreign Secretary also read a telegram received from Sir Eric Phipps to the effect that the French Government were much disturbed, as they had not been informed of what had happened at Berchtesgaden, and asked that M. Daladier and M. Bonnet might come to London as soon as possible. This telegram had been despatched before the French had received the information which he had just referred to. He thought that there was great danger that the responsibility for the decision taken at the present time might be placed on our shoulders, although it was France and not we ourselves who had Treaty obligations with the Czechoslovak Government.

After further discussion on this point it was agreed

- (i) That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should invite the representatives of the French Government to come over to this country as soon as possible for discussion;
- (ii) and that the discussions with the French should be conducted on the basis that we should endeavour to reach a joint decision with the French Government.

In the course of further discussion THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR suggested that it might be desirable that a Committee of Experts should be called together to examine the possibilities of improvising a workable scheme for a plebiscite. The General Staff had already prepared a paper on the military forces which would be necessary to exercise control. It appeared that not less than 3 divisions would be required, and that it would be difficult to protect them from outside attack, for example, by the Czech forces. The problems were not, he thought, insoluble but it was desirable that they should be examined as soon as possible.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he hoped his colleagues were prepared to express their general agreement with the proposition that we should accept the principle of self-determination, on the understanding that no announcement to this effect should be made for the present time, and that we should next proceed to negotiate with the French.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL suggested that the Cabinet should endorse the attitude which the Prime Minister had taken in his negotiations with Herr Hitler, but should postpone recording a formal decision until after the negotiations with the French.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE thought it was a little difficult to reach a decision on such a vital issue, when the Cabinet had only just been informed of the position resulting from the Prime Minister's discussion with Herr Hitler. Further, unless the Prime Minister was certain that he could obtain



satisfactory conditions, we might be faced with a demand for a plebiscite in its baldest form. He would like further time to consider the matter.

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH also thought that it was undesirable to conclude the discussion that morning, without further consideration. If the Polish and Hungarian minorities also demanded self-determination, the result might be the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that the difficulty he felt in arriving at a decision was the fear that, by doing so, we might be led into a complete surrender. He noted with some regret that the Prime Minister had not been able to put forward to Herr Hitler a number of reasonable propositions (such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer's plan for autonomy for a period of years, to be followed by a plebiscite). Further, what Herr Hitler had said about Czechoslovakia's Treaty with Russia showed that he was not prepared to leave any independence to Czechoslovakia. He thought that Czechoslovakia would probably prefer to fight.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER was also in favour of postponing a decision until there had been time for further discussion.

THE PRIME MINISTER said he thought that it was entirely reasonable that the Cabinet should have further opportunity for discussion

It was agreed that it was desirable to have a further discussion in Cabinet before the French representatives started. The Cabinet accordingly adjourned until 3.0 p.m.



THE CABINET resumed discussion of the international position which had been adjourned at 1.30 p.m.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that a telegram had been received from Geneva to the effect that M. Bonnet was somewhat incensed that the French had not been immediately brought into consultation. He thought that this had been put right by the action which had now been taken.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER said that he had little to say. He hoped the Cabinet would give the Prime Minister an assurance that what the Prime Minister had already given as his personal opinion, expressed the general view of the Government.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR referred to the principles of foreign policy laid down by Canning and approved by Disraeli. Under that policy two conditions had to be satisfied before we intervened. First, that British interests were seriously affected; secondly, that we should only intervene with overwhelming force. When he became Lord Chancellor, this policy was being observed. He had been informed that British interests were not vitally affected by what happened to the Sudeten Germans. It was the French whose treaty obligations were involved, and those obligations were not altogether straightforward and were curiously worded. It had, however, been agreed that if the French became involved and their security was threatened, this country could not stand aside. That had been the position up till to-day, except that this country had made endeavours through the Foreign Secretary and Lord Runciman to reach a solution which would satisfy Germany. Now Lord Runciman's efforts had failed, and we had been informed what Herr Hitler's attitude was. Lord Maugham reached the conclusion that, except for some possible loss of prestige, British interests were not involved.

Further, no action on our part could prevent Herr Hitler from over-running Czechoslovakia.

In considering what action should be taken, it must be remembered that we were not immediately involved, but France was. France should therefore be asked first what action she proposed to take. It must be remembered that France had no overwhelming force at her disposal. If the opinion of the French Government were asked, it was likely that they would reply that they were a democratic people, and that they could not go to war to keep 3½ million Germans under the Prague Government. That would be the effect of their answer, save for certain face-saving phrases. He thought that if the French asked us our opinion, we should reply that it was France which was primarily involved, but that we thought they would take a wise course if they said that they would not fight to prevent the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans.

Continuing, the Lord Chancellor said that it would be a very serious thing to involve this country in war in the present dispute. Some people might regard this attitude as cowardly, but such people were not in a position to understand the factors involved. If war broke out to-day, it would be a long and desperate affair and would cause immense sacrifice. Further, the position of the Empire must be considered. The Congress party in India might take advantage of the position; there might be an Arab revolt in Asia and armed neutrality, if not war, on the part of Japan.

Subject to the form in which the Government's determination was made known, he thought that the course proposed by the Prime Minister was the right one.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY, referring to the Lord Chancellor's remarks, said that it was a primary interest of this country to prevent any single power dominating Europe. We were now faced with the most formidable power for a century. As regards the condition that we should not intervene unless we had overwhelming force, we had not got it now and were unlikely to attain it. It was of the utmost importance to pacify Germany and there was almost no length to which he would not go to attain this end. But what chance was there of achieving this? He found it difficult to believe that the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans was Hitler's last aim. He did not altogether understand Herr Hitler's remark about the colonies, to which the Prime Minister had referred.

The First Lord also referred to the series of statements which Herr Hitler had made to the effect that he had no intention of attacking Austria or Czechoslovakia. He felt that his promises were quite unreliable.

At the present time, the country was singularly united, and the Dominions would probably be more attracted by the idea of supporting the democratic countries in a fight against dictators than they were by the issues with which we were faced in 1914.

The First Lord was afraid that even if a solution of the present problem was found, it would not be the end of our troubles, and that there was no chance of peace in Europe so long as there was a Nazi regime in Germany.



He was afraid that Germany might make some attempt on our Colonial Empire, and that on such an issue neither France nor the United States would rally to our help. He saw no prospect that we should be able to increase the tempo of our re-armament, owing to the financial situation.

He hoped that when the Prime Minister saw Herr Hitler again next week he would make it clear that we were only prepared to agree to a plebiscite provided certain conditions were accepted.

Hitherto, the First Lord said, the arguments on which he had relied had run counter to the line of action proposed by the Prime Minister. But a war in modern conditions was a terrible affair, and no government was in a position to forecast the future with certainty. While, therefore, he was afraid that although we might avoid war now we might only be putting off the evil day, there was the chance that some unforeseen event might upset the rule of the Nazi party. That chance, he thought, was worth taking.

If, however, we were to act on this course, he thought we should decide that the Government was prepared to accept the principle of self-determination as the basis of negotiation, but that the question of how it should be applied in the present abnormal circumstances should be the subject of careful enquiry. That was as far as he thought we ought to go.

THE MINISTER FOR CO-ORDINATION OF DEFENCE

said that he thought most of his colleagues would feel the force of what the First Lord had said <sup>of his observations.</sup> in the first part/. He doubted, however, whether there was any ~~very~~ essential difference between his <sup>conclusion</sup> ~~opinion~~ and the Prime Minister's. (The First Lord said that he hoped that this was so).

Continuing, Sir Thomas Inskip said that we must face the facts of the situation. It was not a question of fighting a war to preserve <sup>as at present constituted</sup> Czechoslovakia/- that we could not hope to achieve - but of fighting a war to check Herr Hitler. Such a war would cause immense suffering and damage, and while it might destroy Hitler it ~~would~~ <sup>might</sup> almost certainly destroy a great deal more.. The result might be changes in the state of Europe which ~~would~~ <sup>might</sup> be satisfactory to no one except Moscow and the Bolsheviks. Though the decision was a difficult one, he felt no doubt in his own mind what the decision would be and he agreed with the Prime Minister.

<sup>under other circumstances</sup>  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES said that/ he would prefer some solution other than a plebiscite. It must be remembered that the Czechoslovaks had missed many opportunities through lack of statesmanship, especially in the last few months. Their treatment of minorities left much to be desired. In recent months M. Benes had had opportunities to stave off

the demands of the Sudeten Germans; but he had always procrastinated and been too late. The people of this country would be overwhelmingly in favour of a plebiscite rather than a war. He therefore favoured acceptance of the principle of self-determination. Nevertheless, it was clear that this decision would put us into a possible dilemma. The Prime Minister had said that Herr Hitler would take some violent action if we started to lay down the conditions <sup>before accepting the principle</sup>. If, therefore, we were to deal satisfactorily with Herr Hitler we must accept the principle of self-determination unconditionally and talk about conditions later. From the point of view of our own people this was a difficult position to sustain. He asked whether it was possible to say to Herr Hitler that we accepted self-determination but that we of course would want to sit down with him and work out details so as to ensure the proper implementation of the principle. That, he thought, would leave us with an adequate defence. He thought that it was quite likely that we should obtain a reasonable settlement with Herr Hitler, and in this event the Government would have the overwhelming support of this country. Nevertheless, he anticipated difficulties with France and with the Czechoslovak Government. The latter difficulty might be overcome if we were prepared to give Czechoslovakia a guarantee.



THE HOME SECRETARY said that he had for some time felt that a guarantee was the key to the position. It was important, however, to see that Herr Hitler did not gain everything he wanted without making some concession, and it was very desirable to obtain some quid pro quo from him in the negotiations. He felt quite sure that, apart from the decision to be reached by the Cabinet, self-determination had already started in Czechoslovakia. The Czech Government had really lost the Sudeten Germans and till that fact was recognised there would be no peace in Europe.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA said that Herr Hitler was determined to incorporate the Sudeten Germans in the Reich and that it was impossible to prevent him from doing so. The real question was whether he should do so peacefully or by force. He did not doubt that the former was the better alternative. At the same time he was anxious not to say that we were actuated solely by the principle of self-determination. Were we to do so the Indian Congress Party would not be slow to take advantage of such a declaration on our part.

The Secretary of State for India referred to the appalling results which would follow from a world war. This would bring about the destruction

of the present world order and the emergence of something which might approximate to the ideals of those who controlled the destiny of Russia. He also referred to a number of circumstances which would make war extremely difficult for us at the present time. Italy would be likely to come in against us and we should have to supply forces in the Mediterranean. Owing to recent changes in the British Army in India there were now 12,000 fewer troops in India than in 1914 and it would be difficult to call upon India for reinforcements. Further, Moslem opinion was becoming more and more exercised about the position in Palestine and we should probably require to retain in India all the troops which were now there. If there was no alternative between force and self-determination he would prefer acceptance of the latter.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND said that the vast majority of people would prefer a plebiscite to war, but the method of holding a plebiscite so as to ensure fair treatment was of great importance. We could not urge the French to fight a war so as to prevent the application of the principle of self-determination. He was much impressed by the fact that in the Prime Minister's view Herr Hitler had limited objectives. He trusted that some limitation of armaments might follow the present negotiations.

THE LORD PRIVY SEAL said that it was impossible to object to the principle of self-determination. Nevertheless, in present circumstances he thought that it was almost impossible to make the concessions asked for. These concessions would be unfair to the Czechs and dishonourable to ourselves, after all that we had done in the last few months. He thought it was wrong to assume that there were no other courses open to us than war or complete surrender. He asked whether we had ever placed ourselves in such a humiliating position as to negotiate with a country which had a million and a half men under arms. The third alternative which he suggested was that we should obtain peace with honour, and if that was unobtainable, we must face the possibility of war. Unless we did this, whenever Herr Hitler threatened the world, we should have to concede what he asked for. He suggested that we should say that we accepted the principle of self-determination, but that we would not enter into negotiations (or, perhaps, that we would not agree to the Plebiscite being held) until the German Army had been demobilised. No one was particularly anxious to embark on war on behalf of Czechoslovakia; but he for his part was prepared to face war in order to free the world from the continual threat of ultimatums.

If we took any steps which meant that the Czechoslovakian Government lost their present frontiers, we must be prepared to give that country a guarantee.



Up to the present time neither the Sudeten Germans nor Germany had made any concessions. They must be prepared to make some concession if we were to reach an honourable settlement. If, on the other hand, we reached a settlement which looked like a surrender to force, it was doubtful whether the Government could carry this policy in the House of Commons or in the country, and we should do irreparable damage to our prestige. His main point was that if we took a decision to accept Herr Hitler's terms without obtaining a quid pro quo, that would represent an abject surrender.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the Government had decided some time back that they would not fight for Czechoslovakia, but that they would go to France's assistance, if France were threatened. That attitude should influence the Cabinet's decision today. If France was not prepared to fight Hitler to prevent the Sudeten Germans entering the Reich, there was nothing which we could do, or should be called upon to do.

It was in our interests to prevent any single power dominating Europe; but that had come to pass, and he thought we had no alternative but to submit to what the Lord Privy Seal regarded as humiliation. In his view we should accept the position laid down by the Prime Minister, that we should try to negotiate the best terms obtainable. We must obtain a decision from France whereby that country would put the maximum pressure on M. Benes.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER said that he was profoundly disturbed by the Lord President of the Council's remarks. He thought the Lord President's arguments could equally be used to justify acquiescence in the invasion of Kent or the surrender of the Isle of Wight. It must be remembered that not only had Herr Hitler asked for the return of the German colonies two years ago, but that even before the war Germany had been dissatisfied at the extent of her colonial empire.

It was true that there was no profit in war, but sometimes war had to be faced, since otherwise the alternative was to become a vassal state. In his opinion the issue now before the Cabinet raised the same issue as had been raised in 1914, when Belgium had been invaded. There was hard fibre in the British people which did not like to be told that, unless they acquiesced in certain things, it was all up with them.

Looking at the matter from the Parliamentary point of view, he strongly hoped that the action agreed upon would not be represented as a pure surrender to force. At the time of Mr. Eden's resignation, it had been stated that Mr. Eden had left the Government because it had yielded to a threat of force, and nothing had been more effective than the Prime Minister's statement that this was not the case. If Germany continued to keep her troops mobilised, then our action would be represented as a surrender. It was essential that Germany should make some concession. For example, he would like to see the date of the Plebiscite postponed. He agreed with what the Home Secretary had said about the need for a guarantee.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said he hoped the Cabinet would realise the immense strain on the Prime Minister in negotiating for hours with Herr Hitler. The two colleagues who had spoken last differed as to the weight which should be given to the several realistic arguments which might be marshalled in this matter. He felt the extreme difficulty of weighing properly the arguments produced by the Lord Privy Seal with those advanced by the Lord President of the Council.

He rather shared the views of the Secretary of State for India that it was undesirable to burn too much incense on the altar of self-determination. The most which he was prepared to say on the matter was that it was impossible to lead this country into a war against this principle.

He asked himself, was it possible to give the ordinary man any reason to hope that in future, when the present affair had been dealt with, the temptation to aggression would be lessened, and there would be foundations for some better understanding between the countries? He agreed that the present affair contained an element of German blackmail but this should not blind us to other considerations. The Czechoslovak problem must be looked at in its setting as a problem which was a thousand years old, and which happened to have become active at the present time under the guise of a Dictator's blackmail. He compared this problem again to the stresses and strains at work below the crust of the earth, which would result in an explosion



unless some relief were given. This led him to the view that unless these peoples could be separated and divided up, the problem would never be solved except by war.

Many people talked of the provision in Articles XIX of the Covenant for the revision of boundaries, but such revision could only be carried out in one of three ways - by consent; by the threat of war; or by war. It was obvious that all Europe was at fault for not having faced these problems in the last few years and obtained settlements by consent. His conclusions were fortified by Lord Runciman's view that no local solution was possible. If the alternative to acceptance of the Prime Minister's proposal was war, then, he asked himself, what was the ultimate justification for war? In his view, he would fight for the great moralities which knew no geographical boundaries. But there was no greater urge to fight for Czechoslovakia than to fight Japan because of the bombing of civilians in Canton. If the matter was looked at from the point of view of self interest, he would distinguish between the attack on Czechoslovakia and an attack, say, on the Isle of Wight.

As regards the view that if we did not have war now we should have it later on, that was really the argument for a preventive war. It was, however, impossible to forecast the future. Moreover, the theory of a preventive war meant that we should have a bad war every 20 years, in order to prevent a war from occurring five years later. He had no doubt that if we were involved in war now we should win it after a long time, but he could not feel we

were justified in embarking on action which would result in such untold suffering.

To sum up his views, the Foreign Secretary thought that we should accept the principle of the transfer of these peoples, but he thought that we should first do all we could to restrain aggression and to get Herr Hitler to say publicly that he would be satisfied when he had obtained self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. Secondly, that we should obtain the best possible conditions of transfer. He rather doubted whether it would be desirable to postpone the transfer for long, since the intervening period would be too dangerous. The transfer could not of course be effected at lightning speed. He hoped that the Prime Minister would succeed in obtaining these conditions.

As regards procedure it was very important that we should avoid allowing the French to say that they came to London and found that we had decided to give the show away. His principal anxiety concerned the position in Czechoslovakia. He thought we should increase the number of our observers there and do all we could to assist in keeping order.

As regards a guarantee, he disliked the idea, but thought we should very likely have to concede it when the time came.

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER suggested that in considering any guarantee to Czechoslovakia, that we must be careful about the area whose integrity we guaranteed. We must bear in mind the possibility that the Hungarians and Poles in Czechoslovakia would also demand a Plebiscite.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS concurred.

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR said that he hoped this matter would not be discussed on the basis that our honour was involved in maintaining the existing boundaries of the Czechoslovak state. The present dispute was a very old one. It was true that we had several times yielded to force in recent years, but the root fault was that the League of Nations had not been used as a basis for peaceful change. He thought that the Prime Minister's personal visit to Herr Hitler had had enormous advantages. He had studied Herr Hitler's character as portrayed in numerous books about him, and had reached the conclusion that Herr Hitler combined an inflammatory temper with a cool, clear brain in regard to certain simple objectives. He referred to the various coups which Herr Hitler had carried out, and pointed out that in future, with the exception of the Polish Corridor, his problems did not relate to territories contiguous to his own boundaries.

No doubt we were in a very difficult position in that we were faced with constant demands backed by marching men. But his own view was quite plain, namely, that we must accept the Prime Minister's proposal, provided that we endeavoured to secure satisfactory conditions for the plebiscite.



There were, of course, certain things for which we would fight, and if necessary go down, rather than yield on, but in his view this was not such a case. It would be necessary to have a far more clearly-cut issue before we embarked on war. He was sure the Prime Minister would have the backing of all his colleagues. The Prime Minister's endeavours to obtain a peaceful settlement had the almost desperate goodwill of the whole world.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE said that he did not agree with much that had been said by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Labour. Like the First Lord of the Admiralty, he regarded this question as almost as direct an attack upon us as, say, an attack on the Isle of Wight. This was not the last of Herr Hitler's coups. The present Nazi regime could not exist without coups. If the choice for the Government in the next few days was between surrender and fighting, we ought to fight. His view was that the present was a better rather than a worse time to fight; if the Government found themselves discussing issues of peace or war six months or a year hence on some such issue as the Polish Corridor, or Memel, or the Colonies, the same points would arise. By then, Germany's difficulties would have largely disappeared. If it was a choice between surrender and fighting he would choose the latter, provided we were supported by France. We must be prepared to tell France that, unless ~~terms~~ could be devised which did not represent a mere surrender, we should support her.

Continuing, the President of the Board of Trade said that he did not think that this issue had yet arisen. He was rather less hopeful now than he had been before the Berchtesgaden interview, and felt that we were virtually faced with an ultimatum.

Some people would say that even acceptance of the principle of the plebiscite would be regarded as a surrender but he did not take that view. He thought that there were grounds which justified the acceptance of the principle of the plebiscite.

Acceptance of the principle of the plebiscite was all that the Prime Minister now asked for; but he asked whether it was fair to the Prime Minister to leave matters in this position. For example, while he (the President of the Board of Trade) would be satisfied with a plebiscite carried out under reasonable conditions, he would regard a plebiscite taking place under the guns of an armed force of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million men as a surrender. There was every possible gradation between these two extremes. He thought that several other Ministers shared his view and were ready to say that they were prepared to accept certain proposals for a plebiscite but that they could not accept others.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE pointed out that the Prime Minister had felt it impossible to mention conditions at his interview with Herr Hitler, but that at the second meeting he would have to start negotiating conditions. He thought that the Cabinet should make certain, before the Prime Minister resumed the negotiations, that he knew what conditions his colleagues would regard as acceptable. He suggested that, whilst the French negotiations were being conducted, the Cabinet, or a Committee of the Cabinet, should discuss this vital matter of conditions.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION said that he could not regard the question of the Sudeten Germans as <sup>comparable to the role</sup> ~~an issue which~~ ~~of high importance. The leaders of the Sudeten Germans had declared in favour of the~~ ~~affected the vital interests of this country in the same way~~ ~~as an attack on our own territories. He thought that stress~~ ~~should be laid on the fact that the demand had come from the~~ ~~the Sudeten Germans would not be satisfied with anything less~~ ~~Sudeten leaders rather than that it had come from Herr Hitler.~~ ~~than self-determination.~~



M. Benes had missed his opportunities so often that separation was now inevitable. There was no reason why the Prime Minister should not discuss with Herr Hitler the conditions on which the plebiscite should be held. The problem of maintaining law and order during the plebiscite was the most difficult one we had to face *and must directly affect the conditions which could be obtained*.

THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT said that Great Britain and Germany were the two greatest Powers to-day and Germany was greater than Herr Hitler. It was impossible to keep down a country of 70 million people. He thought that the present negotiations marked the beginning of a new era which would result in Anglo-German understanding. He favoured the resumption of negotiations on the basis of the acceptance of a plebiscite, with a view to the negotiation of satisfactory conditions. He had no hesitation in supporting the course proposed by the Prime Minister.

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES thought the future was dark. If a settlement on the basis of self-determination was proposed he thought that we could not oppose such a settlement by war. To the question posed in this way there could in his view be only one answer. The country would be wholeheartedly behind the course of action proposed by the Prime Minister.

Neither in his Nuremberg Speech nor in his conversations with the Prime Minister had Herr Hitler used the word "plebiscite". There must be some reason for this. Was it that he hoped to secure that there was no bar to the cession of these territories without a plebiscite? Or was it that he was not satisfied with a plebiscite that was



the only way out, and that he might possibly be satisfied with some cantonal solution. Owing to their distressed economic position the Sudeten areas were not a prize to covet. He did not feel to the same extent as some of his colleagues, that our honour was implicated in the dispute. We had been careful never to commit ourselves to take action in the event of a dispute over Czechoslovakia. The wisdom of this course was now evident and we should act upon it. It would be very rash to intrude the Empire into a quarrel which was not our own affair. He was quite clear in his own mind as to what our attitude should be. If France were drawn in then our interests were involved, but otherwise we should not allow ourselves to become involved.

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH said that he had listened with great attention to the Foreign Secretary's remarks, and was not disappointed by the persuasive way in which he had stated his case. Nevertheless, the arguments used led him to fear that we might be cloaking our real motives.

If in the course of the negotiations we were faced with the alternatives of surrender or war, we must choose the latter. He thought that we should accept self-determination as the basis on which to open negotiations, and that if we could induce Herr Hitler to produce some military detente we might reach a satisfactory position. If not, we should revert to some of the plans which had been brought forward to improve our military position, such as the mobilisation of the Fleet. Herr Hitler could not object to this, as we could say that as he would not step down from his preparations, which were greater than ours, we should have to increase our own. If we did not

take such action, he thought that Parliament would become highly critical, on the grounds that we had taken no steps to convince Herr Hitler that there was a point at which we should withstand him. If we were faced with an intolerable demand, it was our duty to oppose such a demand by war.

He was all in favour of increasing the number of Observers in Czechoslovakia. Such a measure would be very valuable.

By force of circumstances we had been forced into this question and had been obliged to take a leading part. Our prestige was now deeply involved. Nor could we withdraw without breaking the national front, which was perhaps our greatest asset at the present time. Even the extreme Left were fully in accord with the action which we had taken.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR said that we were never committed to go to war on account of Czechoslovakia, but we would have to go to war if France became involved. That, however, was quite a separate question from the merits of the present proposal. He thought that we should accept the present proposal, provided that we could ensure that the transfer of population was carried out under reasonable conditions. He thought that we should agree to the transfer of the peoples who wished to be incorporated in the Reich, provided that we were not irretrievably committed to some particular method.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR said that he supported the action proposed by the Prime Minister. He did not think that the nation would support any action which would involve us in war in order to prevent the principle of determination. It would, of course, be

necessary that reasonable conditions for a Plebiscite should be laid down. He thought that it was very necessary that we should look ahead and consider the position vis-a-vis public opinion at home and abroad in regard to the decision now to be taken. It was very desirable that we should enter into discussions with the French Government in this matter, but as soon as the French Government was informed, the position would become known and there might be an insistent demand to recall Parliament. The view might be taken that, if Parliament was not recalled now, we should be hopelessly committed before Parliament had any chance of expressing its views in the matter.

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THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that there was almost no length to which he would not go to avoid war. The Lord President of the Council had said that we should *submit to a humiliation*; and he thought that this represented the position. He reminded the Cabinet that at Wednesday's meeting he had said that it was of the utmost importance that we should not offend France. He hoped we had not done so. We were in danger of being accused of truckling to Dictators, and offending our best friends. He thought we should make it plain to France that we would fight rather than agree to an abject surrender, and that we should support the French rather than attempt to put a brake upon their actions.



THE PRIME MINISTER said that his colleagues had accepted the principle of self-determination, and had given him the support he had asked for; he was most grateful to them. One course would be for him to say no more, and leave it at that; but he thought that perhaps he had better say something in regard to the views that had been expressed.

He had been somewhat surprised at the First Lord's conclusion, as from his opening remarks he thought he was going to say that we must now stand and fight. It was not until the Lord Privy Seal's speech that any of his colleagues had contemplated actual hostilities. He (the Prime Minister) recognised that in certain circumstances we should have to fight, even if our armaments were weaker than they were. But in modern circumstances war was very different from what it was in 1914. To-day war affected the whole population. He wished he could show his colleagues some of the many letters which he had received in the last few days, which showed the intense feeling of relief throughout the country, and of thankfulness and gratitude for the load which had been lifted, at least temporarily.

If at any time we were convinced that some vital British interest was at stake, then, of course, we should have to go through with it; but we should have to be very fully satisfied that this was the case. The alternatives to-day were not between abject surrender and war. Acceptance of the principle of self-determination was not an abject surrender.

In the account of his conversations with Herr Hitler he could not repeat every word which had passed. No doubt it might be thought that at a particular moment he should have used some rather different language, but in a single-handed conversation it was necessary to act quickly. Also, he had been actuated by the desire not to say something which would force Herr Hitler to commit himself to something to which he had not committed himself already. For this reason he had not asked Herr Hitler whether he thought that any other solution would be preferable.

We had agreed to accept the principle of self-determination and had thus secured the only condition on which negotiations could be carried on. But that of course did not mean that we should give Herr Hitler a free hand.

The comment made by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, on the fact that the word "plebiscite" had not been mentioned, was quite just. It might be that we should find that Herr Hitler said that he did not want to have any vote. On the other hand, he might demand an immediate plebiscite.

The Prime Minister said that it had never entered his head that he should go to Germany and say to Herr Hitler that he could have self-determination on any terms he wanted. He would not assent to any such agreement.

If, as had been suggested, he were to say now to Herr Hitler that he would not return unless Germany demobilised, the only result would be that Herr Hitler would order

his troops to march straight into Czechoslovakia. We might not like that position, but there it was. If our rearmament programme had not progressed so far as it had, it would have been impossible for him (the Prime Minister) to have faced Herr Hitler at all. It was only the fact that we had increased our strength and were now a formidable Power that enabled us to speak with any influence. The Prime Minister emphasised that the acceptance by the Cabinet of self-determination in principle did not mean any more than it said.

The Prime Minister referred to recent telegrams from Czechoslovakia which showed that opinion was hardening against self-determination. This might result in precipitate action by Herr Hitler which we should not be able to stop. The Prime Minister recognised that an attempt by Herr Hitler to force the issue of self-determination without proper arrangements was not a transaction with which we should care to be associated. Nevertheless, he rather deprecated any attempt to tie his hands too closely by fixing precise limits beyond which he should not go, when he resumed the negotiations.

Another possibility, which he hoped would prove correct, was that, if we now accepted the principle of self-determination, Herr Hitler would feel himself to some extent committed to an orderly carrying-out of the principle.



When the negotiations came to the question of procedure, it would be necessary to provide conditions which would enable law and order to be preserved. That would prove a very difficult matter.

Further, there still remained the question whether it was possible to make the change any less unpalatable to the Czechoslovakians. More than one Minister had said that we should have to give them a guarantee. On this he agreed with the Foreign Secretary. He disliked the proposal, as it involved a commitment in a distant country; a commitment, moreover, which we could not carry out effectively. Its value would lie in its deterrent effect. He thought, therefore, we could not exclude the possibility of giving a guarantee, for which a good deal of support had been forthcoming at this meeting. The matter would, of course, have to be considered when the time came. He had not proposed to make any suggestion about a guarantee to Herr Hitler, at any rate at the present time. Our next step would be to have discussions with the French.

After some further discussion it was agreed that, while the Cabinet was in general agreement with the views expressed by the Prime Minister, it was undesirable to record any conclusion until discussions with the French Government had taken place.

It was also agreed that the Cabinet should hold themselves available for a meeting at, say, two hours' notice. Owing to the discussions with the French, which the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the Cabinet were due to start at 11.0 a.m. on Sunday morning, no meeting would be held on Sunday morning, and it was unlikely that any further meeting of the Cabinet would be necessary until Monday morning.

The Prime Minister mentioned that he was seeing Mr. Herbert Morrison, M.P., Dr. Hugh Dalton, M.P. and Sir Walter Citrine that evening. He proposed to inform them of the upshot of his discussion with Herr Hitler; he thought that he might ask them whether they thought the country would be prepared to go to war to prevent the application of the principle of self-determination. He would not, of course, inform them of the general sense of the discussion which they had had in the Cabinet.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES mentioned the question of communication with the Dominions, and it was agreed that a telegram should be despatched after consultation between the Foreign Office, the Dominions Office and the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

It was also agreed that consideration of any further defence precautions, e.g. naval mobilisation, should stand over for the present.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

THE CABINET agreed -

- (1) To postpone recording any Conclusion on the report made by the Prime Minister on his visit to Herr Hitler until discussions with the French Government had taken place.
- (2) That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should invite representatives of the French Government to come over to this country as soon as possible for discussion.
- (3) That the discussions with the French should be conducted on the basis that we should endeavour to reach a joint decision with the French Government.

Richmond Terrace,  
Whitehall, S.W.1.  
17th September, 1938.